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THE COMPOSITION OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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We can stimulate our power of observation by reading the Gospel according to Matthew as if it were a document wholly new to us. We may imagine the case of our having had hitherto all the rest of early Christian literature but not this precious record of the deeds and words of Jesus. From the other materials we should have constructed the view of Christian origins which prevails today. If now we were suddenly presented with the gospel in question, we should at once begin to determine its relations to other documents, to enumerate its special characteristics, and to find a place for it in the stages of development constructed by church historians from the other extant sources.

We may be sure that the very first inference made would be that it originated later than the year 70 A. D. The parable of the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22:2 ff. would at once be identified as an allegorizing redaction of the parable given in Luke 14:16 ff. In Luke it is a relatively simple story of a man who prepares a feast and sends out his servant to inform the expected guests that all is ready. Since the invited neighbors are indifferent and offer one excuse or another for absence, the host invites in their stead all the humble people who will come, the poor and crippled folk of the streets and of the country roads. In our new-found gospel we should observe that this simple illustrative tale is somewhat made over in order to relate it to a historic event. It has become the story of a king who sends out many servants in succession with summons for the marriage-feast of his royal son. The servants are abusively treated and killed by the persons invited; whereupon the king in wrath despatches his armies to destroy the murderers and burn their city. Then he, too, bids his servants gather in the random wayfarers. When moreover we hear further of an unworthy guest cast out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, we are aware that the original

illustrative story has become an allegory. The feast is the banquet of the Messiah. The casting-out of the unfit man suggests the procedure of the Day of Judgment. The servants are easily understood as the messengers of the heavenly king. It is the Jewish people who reject the summons. It is the city of the Jews that is destroyed by fire and flames. Our inevitable inference is that the original story has been forced into an unnatural form in order to have it apply to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. If we look then for other features that may strengthen this inference as to the date of the gospel, we may find one of uncertain value in the implication of 23:38, that Jerusalem now lies in ruin, forsaken by the heavenly king. We might discover others in the touches of 24:48 and 25:5, where the failure of the master or the bridegroom to come at the expected time may be further allegorizings indicating a generation when men have been forced to reflect on the delay of the Lord's advent beyond the predicted or expected time. These less secure indications would not enable us to measure the time that may have elapsed since the year 70. The emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem, the obvious thrill of interest in that event, leads Harnack to infer that for the writer of the gospel the event is still recent. Jülicher objects that we have only the fact that the interest of this particular author singled out that conspicuous event as the meaning of a gospel story and that the allusions to persecutions under governors and kings should lead us to infer a date as late as the closing years of Domitian's reign, for then, as we otherwise know, Christians in many places began to feel the peril of their situation under the Roman government. This suggestion is far from convincing. The language of Matthew hardly exceeds the phrasing of Mark (as in Mark 13:9), and for Mark we are not asked to suppose any such late date of origin.

While we cannot with any confidence agree with Jülicher and Loisy on these grounds that the date is the very end of the first century, we proceed to other aspects of the gospel which carry an indication of a relatively advanced time of origin. Had we never before seen this gospel, we should never have had words of Jesus to warrant the view that he instituted or foresaw the Christian church. We should have understood that in all his utterances he was addressing

the religious community of Israel, and that he was seeking to arouse the Jewish people to the great issue imposed by the certain and speedy advent of the kingdom of God. Beyond that advent there could be no organization save that of the kingdom itself. And we should agree that after the death of Jesus his earliest followers were still members of the Jewish religious organism, and only slowly found themselves a separate body when their adhesion to Jesus as exalted to heavenly messianic authority began to differentiate them from their countrymen. We should remember that in Paul's time there was controversy over the degree in which separation from Israel was necessitated by the new religious good enjoyed by Christians, and we should probably agree that only when the original apostles were gone from the scene was the controversy forgotten. Only as they began to recede in memory was the consciousness of being a universal church on one harmonious basis of apostolic preaching fully and widely possible. The Book of Acts indicates that at the end of the first century such a Catholic consciousness was securely developed and that then the work of Peter in the creation of the universal church was viewed as of primary significance; that at such a time, furthermore, the disciplinary power exercised by presbyters or bishops was regarded as a continuation of the authority of the original apostles. Now in Matthew's gospel there are passages which, in contradistinction from Mark and Luke, contain this advanced and post-apostolic idea of the church. Although in 10:23 the author records a saying of Jesus which anticipates the advent before the evangelization of Israel shall be complete, we may believe that his own forecast is in accord with the impressive words with which his gospel ends. There we find the recognition of a Christian discipleship differentiated from Judaism, a church of all nations (28:19), and a church which has the promise of the continual presence of the risen Lord until the world's end. So also in 18:19 we see that the church is viewed as a community of those who pray to God in the name of Jesus, of those whose prayer is effectual through Jesus. This conception goes beyond the contents of Mark and Luke and seems to reflect an age when the Christian community has arrived at a consciousness of itself as constituted by the mediating work of the risen Lord. The associated idea, that when the disciples pray, Jesus is in their midst,

could only be intelligible for those who were accustomed to the sense of the presence of the risen Jesus in the holy assembly, a sense which must have developed through the long-standing usages of communion with him in ritual act. For the idea is not identical with Paul's conception of a personal union of individual believers with the glorified Pneuma-Christ. It is rather the idea of a relation of the worshiping community as such with its exalted Head, and the expression takes us into the atmosphere of thought which we find in post-Pauline literature like the Epistle to the Ephesians or the Johannine documents. That the author found at hand words of the Lord for the expression of this idea may be readily granted; but it may also be believed that some of these words were contributed to tradition by charismatic speakers in early churches, men who in hours of tense experience were regarded as speaking with the mind of the Lord. That the view in question could misappropriate actual words of the Galilean Jesus may be seen by a comparison of Matt. 18:15 with Luke 17:3. In Luke we have a saying of Jesus about the duty of the individual to forgive one who offends him personally. In Matthew the wording makes it the case of a man who, unknown to the church, sins against the holiness of the church. At this point, diverging from Luke's record, the evangelist ascribes to Jesus the disciplinary rules which have become established in Christian churches for just such a case: first a private remonstrance, and only when that fails of effect exposure of the delinquent to the church. We may infer that the church is supposed to discipline through the officers regarded as heirs of the paternal authority of the apostles, for immediately thereafter (18:18) such disciplinary power is conferred on the disciples collectively. It is of course possible that the entire listening company is supposed to be thus empowered, but it is more probable that the evangelist means the twelve apostles, in harmony with the post-apostolic idea that the disciplinary power of church governors was an inheritance from the first apostolic missionaries (Acts 14:23). This is the more likely in view of the famous passage in 16:18 where this church authority is specially conferred on Peter as representing the foundation of the visible church. Absent as this passage is from the record of Mark, who draws from Peter's own memory, it must reflect the

later consciousness of the church concerning Peter as the chief of the apostles, the principal witness of the resurrection, and highest in veneration among apostolic names.

These are not the only indications that the materials of the gospel tradition have been here enriched or shaped into conformity with the interests and points of view of a later day. From the outset the Christian company desired to show that the death and rising of Jesus were in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and the habit of finding correspondence to prophecy would easily develop and provide an ampler interpretation of the career of Jesus. It is clear that in the composition of Matthew's gospel this has become a fixed method of presentation, and while this of itself cannot afford a precise indication of date it at least takes us into an age and a circle where a kind of literary construction has taken the place of the living memory of eye-witnesses and first hearers. An extreme instance is found in chap. 21 where the narrator makes Jesus enter Jerusalem on two animals because of someone's inaccurate understanding of Zech. 9:9. With this well-developed argumentative style of narration we may join a development of liturgical expression. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer begins with the simple, direct invocation, "Father," and Paul's "Abba Father" seems to be reminiscent of such directness and simplicity. Here and often elsewhere Matthew uses an ampler liturgical style, "Our Father, who art in heaven." This may be reminiscent of the conventicle. Similarly Matthew represents Jesus as customarily saying, "My Father" or "My Heavenly Father;" hence from Matthew alone some have inferred that Jesus always emphasized his own privileged relationship to God and implied that the sonship of other men was a mediated one. A comparison with the other gospels shows that we have here a stylistic departure from the simpler early tradition. In Mark the only approach to this usage is the balance of the Son, the Father, in 13:32, but there the Sinai Syriac has "a man" in place of "the Son." In Luke the only cases are 2:49, the speech of the boy in the temple, not a part of apostolic memory, and 22:29, a saying which is one of the most doubtful in the gospel tradition. "My Heavenly Father" appears in Matt. 15:13; 16:17; 18:14, 19, 35. In all these cases there is nothing corresponding to the passage in

the other gospels. In 12:50 we are able to check by Mark and Luke; in 7:21 and 10:32 and 33 by Luke. In these instances Mark and Luke fail to support the phraseology. The expression, "My Father," appears in Matt. 25:34 and 26:53 where we have nothing in the other gospels with which to make comparison, and in five other passages Mark or Luke or both fail to support Matthew's wording. It is clearly a matter of Matthew's style.

This peculiarity may be more than a matter of taste and liturgical habit. It may be associated with the thought of one remaining instance, Matt. 11:27, which is to the effect that knowledge of the Heavenly Father is mediated by Jesus the Son. If we derive our understanding of the thought of Jesus from the main body of Matthew's materials, the words of 11:27 are an incongruous intrusion. Doubtless Jesus declared that his *παράδοσις* was from God and with absolute assurance summoned men to wear the gentle yoke which his teaching would impose. But shall he who from Israel's law quotes: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," or from Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," declare that knowledge of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob is mediated by himself alone? Even if 27*a* is credible from Jesus the rest of the verse is incredible. From the presence of the words in similar connection though dissimilar form in Luke we infer that the gloss is of prior origin, but the form used in Matthew is intelligible only when read historically as reflecting the experience of pagan converts in the great mission field, converts who first obtained a revelation and sense of the true God through their discipleship to Jesus. For such converts this was a true form. It is consonant with such a voice from the mission field as speaks in I Clem. 36:2 and it is a thought which culminates and dominates in the Fourth Gospel.

The missionary extension of the faith in the Gentile world has given another characteristic to this gospel. Jewish propagandists, as we know, condensed the ethical demands of Judaism for Gentile proselytes into summary statements of simple ethics with a neglect of ceremonial prescriptions. Such a code of ethical precepts of Jewish origin has been adopted and adapted for Christian use in the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Pagan converts breaking with old customs and old standards must be provided with a set of Christian rules.

Something like this has been attempted by our evangelist, but with an effort to discriminate the rules of Jesus from the rules of rabbinical teaching. Such a procedure is dictated by the necessities of the mission field outside of Palestine. When the new propaganda was definitely recognized as separate and distinct from Judaism, it could not base its demands upon the precepts of the Old Testament, however venerated as religious authority that body of Scripture might be. Therefore in our gospel Jesus is viewed as performing the service of a second Moses, and, from a mountain analogous to Sinai, he promulgates a code of Christian law which is a revision, or reformation, of the old. Under the sway of this conception generations of men since that time have had recourse to this new code for rules to guide their conduct. Nevertheless a comparison of the utterances of Jesus as thus presented with the more scattered materials of Luke shows an artificiality of compilation. Indeed a closer reading of Matthew's own sermon shows that the sayings could not originally have been connected in any such systematic form and that the original intention was not to utter precepts and rules of a code of conduct. The materials resist the kind of construction which is given them. Apparently we have rules about fasting, prayer, almsgiving, but on examination we find that they were not rules but illustrations. By means of the cases of fasting, prayer, deeds of charity, Jesus was illustrating the danger of publicity and the need of safeguarding the singleness and purity of the motive. Therefore the wholly secondary form of law has been imposed on the original elements of tradition.

We have thus an accumulation of indications that the author of this gospel did not write with any personal memory of the original scene of the preaching of Jesus. He is editing and constructing or using previous editings and constructions of tradition, and his treatment is shaped by the life and experiences of circles of believers in the Mediterranean world in post-apostolic times. This is not the work of any Matthew who walked in Galilee with Jesus, but of one who in later days walked in the spiritual fellowship of the risen Lord.

It has been implied that the gospel derived much of its form from the conditions of the church outside of Palestine. Yet the author may have been of Jewish origin. If there were no other evidence we might rely on the peculiarities exhibited in Hawkins'

Horae Synopticae (pp. 132-35). It is surely on Jewish models of composition that the discourses of Jesus are given in five blocks, that there are seven beatitudes, seven petitions of prayer, seven parables, seven woes (chap. 23), three duties of alms, prayer, and fasting, three weightier matters of the law (23:23), three temptations, three prayers in Gethsemane, ten miracles grouped (cf. *Pirqe Aboth* 5:5, 8). This indication of Jewish origin is strengthened by another observation. The author's use of Old Testament quotations shows that he commonly follows the text of the Greek Septuagint, but that in a considerable number of instances the wording shows a use of the Hebrew text. Burkitt offers the surmise that the evangelist was using a collection of Hebrew texts belonging to one of his sources, but Burkitt's supposition is that this collection served also as a source for Luke. But in fact all the quotations shared by Matthew with Luke are in agreement with the Septuagint Greek, and all but one of those which belong to Mark as well as Matthew. It is only in the quotations which belong to Matthew alone that the control of the Hebrew text appears. It is only, therefore, when we are unable to suppose common sources for the gospels, only when we have Matthew in independence that Hebrew knowledge is manifested.

Granting, then, that the author was a Jew by birth, it is nevertheless certain by the observations already made that he was not a partisan Jewish Christian. He lives in the consciousness of a church of all nations (28:18 f.). The Christian law is the Sermon on the Mount. He recast the story of the Marriage Feast in an anti-Jewish sense and in the parable of the Vineyard he emphasizes the point by adding a verse not found in Mark or Matthew: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (21:43). On the other hand the gospel contains some elements incongruous with this view. The author could doubtless reconcile with his attitude the bidding to do what the Pharisees teach (23:3), or the limitation of the mission field at the outset to Jews (10:5); but when the limitation extends to the advent (10:23) and the least detail of the law is forever valid (5:18 f.), a plain incongruity appears. The extreme indorsement of the letter of the law contradicts the attitude of the evangelist and of Jesus himself (15:11). The explanation can only be that in the last-

named instance, at least, a source of Jewish Christian party view has been embodied.

We are brought, then, to the question of the sources of the gospel. The time has passed when it was necessary to argue that Matthew as well as Luke has built upon the fundamental narrative of Mark. Mention has been made of the five more or less extended discourses given in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, the address to missionary disciples (chap. 10), the parabolic group (chap. 13), the discourse to disciples (chap. 18), and to the Pharisees (chap. 23). Remove these groups of materials and all the rest, with a few minor transpositions, follows the order and often to a striking degree the very text of Mark's narrative. There are indeed additional passages of discourse like the speech of the Baptist, or the Beelzebub discourse in chap. 12, but these simply amplify the narrative situation which is shared with Mark. It is the five more extended discourses which interrupt the Markan narrative, and when they are withdrawn Matthew's gospel is but a moderate amplification of Mark's. Thus again we are assured of an authorship later than the year 70 and of the absence of a personal memory of the deeds and words of Jesus. No companion of Jesus would have needed to depend thus upon a written record composed by one who himself knew things only by report. The manner in which the discourses are interjected into Mark's order of narration suggests that Matthew had at command a collection of sayings for which a relation to time and place was not always given. When therefore we discover that Luke also contains a large part of the same discourse material but has attempted a different relation of it to the same fundamental narrative, the suggested inference becomes a reasonable certainty. Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a basis, and both used a second source which was essentially a collection of sayings of the Lord without, or for the most part without, narrative setting. This theory of two main sources in common for Matthew and Luke is the established result of modern critical study of the synoptic problem. Not all that we read in Matthew can be referred to these two sources. The first two chapters, containing the genealogy of Joseph, the virgin birth of Jesus, the adoration of the Magi, the flight into Egypt and return to Nazareth are from a source or sources independent of the

others. The same account must be given of more than two score additional elements dispersed in the gospel after 12:5. In a few unimportant cases, as 21:14-16, it is suggested that the evangelist himself is decking out the narrative, since a source, written or oral, would have offered something less general, more concretely visualized. There is, however, little inducement to think of the author as inventing materials. He is a collector and editor. For these additional materials it is not necessary to suppose a single documentary source. The genealogy of Joseph may well have come from some written bit of Palestinian origin, while Peter's walking on the waves (14:28 f.), or the word to Peter in 16:17 f. may have been gathered from the oral deliverances of Christians who remembered and revered the great missionary. There being no evidence of a single source of definite character we are in all such cases obliged to study each passage by itself with detailed literary criticism. But the closer study of the relation of Matthew to his sources lies beyond the scope of our paper.